

News Release

U.S. Department of Justice

*United States Attorney
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Gregory A. White, United States Attorney for the Northern District of Ohio, John F. Ferster, Resident Agent in Charge, Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA); Derek M. Siegle, Acting Special Agent in Charge, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI); and Drew Alexander, Summit County Sheriff and head of the Summit County Drug Unit, today announced the execution of search and arrest warrants in Akron, Canton and Columbus, Ohio, in connection with a drug trafficking enterprise centered on the "Thomas Family" of Akron, Ohio, and its leader, Ervin Thomas. According to Mr. White, a 19-count indictment was unsealed charging the following defendants:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Last Known Address</u>
Ervin Thomas	44	Columbus, Ohio
Eddie Grant	46	Akron, Ohio
Terrance Thomas	39	Akron, Ohio
Carolyn Thomas-Reliford	41	Akron, Ohio
Leroy Grant	44	Barberton, Ohio
Mark Jones	43	Canton, Ohio
Meles Hailu Mezgebo	46	Indianapolis, Indiana
Veronica Guzman-Tellez	42	Chicago, Illinois
Gabriela Sarahy-Guzman	21	Chicago, Illinois
John W. Smith	53	Indianapolis, Indiana
Ernest Ruffin	33	Akron, Ohio
Leandre Lewis	33	Akron, Ohio
Dazzle Joe Young	63	Akron, Ohio

Each of the defendants are charged in Count 1 of the indictment with conspiracy to distribute and to possess with the intent to distribute cocaine and crack. The indictment alleges that the conspiracy existed from at least as early as May 2006 to approximately September 2007, and involved more than five kilograms of cocaine and 50 grams of crack. The maximum statutory penalty for this offense is life imprisonment.

The indictment further alleges substantive counts of cocaine distribution in Counts 2 through 16:

COUNT	DATE	DEFENDANT(S)	AMOUNT
2	May 4, 2006	Terrance Thomas	27.72 grams
3	June 7, 2006	Terrance Thomas	43.9 grams
4	June 22, 2006	Terrance Thomas	81.8 grams
5	July 24, 2006	Terrance Thomas Ervin Thomas Leroy Grant	56.5 grams
6	September 20, 2006	Terrance Thomas	55.6 grams
7	October 19, 2006	Leandre Lewis	14.99 grams
8	November 21, 2006	Terrance Thomas	56.2 grams
9	January 30, 2007	Terrance Thomas	12.9 grams
10	February 7, 2007	Ernest Ruffin	11.0 grams
11	June 7, 2007	Terrance Thomas	42.0 grams
12	July 15, 2007	Terrance Thomas Mark Jones	491.68 grams
13	September 13, 2007	Ernest Ruffin	13.7 grams
14	September 17, 2007	Dazzle Joe Young	7.0 grams
15	September 19, 2007	Ervin Thomas	147.3 grams
16	September 24, 2007	Ernest Ruffin	27.5 grams

The maximum statutory penalty for each of these offenses is 20 years imprisonment.

Counts 17 and 19 of the indictment charge defendants Meles Hailu Mezgebo, Veronica Guzman-Tellez, Gabriela Sarahy-Guzman and John W. Smith with interstate travel to promote drug trafficking. The maximum statutory penalty for this offense is 20 years imprisonment.

Finally, Count 18 charges defendants Eddie Grant, Veronica Guzman-Tellez, and Gabriela Sarahy-Guzman with engaging in a financial transaction involving \$14,257.00 in U.S. currency, which represented proceeds of a specified unlawful activity, that is drug trafficking. The maximum statutory penalty for this offense is 20 years imprisonment.

If convicted, a defendant's sentence will be determined by the Court after review of factors unique to the case, including the defendant's prior criminal record, if any, the defendant's role in the offense, and the characteristics of the violation. In all cases, the sentence will not exceed the statutory maximum and in most cases, it will be less than the maximum authorized by law.

According to Mr. White, the investigation was conducted under the U.S. Attorney's Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF) which is part of a national program that seeks to identify, investigate and prosecute significant drug trafficking enterprises by utilizing multiple investigative and prosecutive resources. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Samuel A. Yannucci, who is assigned to the OCDETF Unit for the Northern District of Ohio.

DEA Resident Agent in Charge Ferster noted, "This investigation not only showcased the ongoing coordinated effort of federal and state law enforcement agencies comprising the Summit County Drug Unit to meet local community concerns about drug trafficking but also evidenced how those efforts can impact the broader national war on drugs."

Sheriff Alexander added, "The Summit County Drug Unit received valuable assistance throughout the investigation from the United States Marshal's Office Fugitive Task Force, the Akron Police Department and its Street Narcotics Unit Detail (SNUD), and the Canton Police Department."

The Summit County Drug Unit consists of agents from DEA, FBI, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF), Ohio Bureau of Criminal Identification and Investigation (BCI) and law enforcement officers from the Summit County Sheriff's Office and the Police Departments of Akron, University of Akron, Barberton, Copley, Cuyahoga Falls, Reminderville, Springfield Township, Stow, and Twinsburg.

An indictment is only a charge. It is not evidence of guilt. A defendant is entitled to a fair trial, in which it will be the government's burden to prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

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